



HELPFILE

PUT YOUR QUESTIONS TO OUR TECHNICAL EXPERTS

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CONTACTING HELPFILE

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When writing to *Helpfile*, please try to give full details of your problem. We also require both daytime and evening phone numbers in case we need more information. Although the policy of *Computer Shopper* is not to publish readers' email addresses, we include them in *Helpfile* so that other readers with experience of similar problems can share their solution (please also cc any comments to helpfile@computershopper.co.uk). If you would prefer not to have your email address published, please say so.

PAUL MULLEN

Paul has been a transport demand forecaster, economic adviser to the government and IT consultant to many big companies, and has been using and writing software for personal computers since 1978

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GRAPHICS SCREEN COLOURS

MONITOR SHOWS WRONG COLOURS

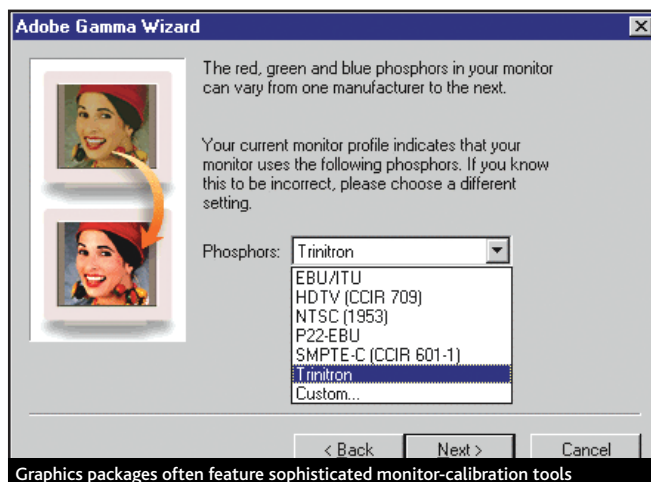
Q I use an Acer AL1912 LCD monitor with an nVidia GeForce FX5200 graphics card. Ever since I bought the monitor I have been unhappy with the colours it displays, which are very weak and washed out. For example, when using Illustrator or CorelDraw, 10 per cent black is a very light blue. I have adjusted the monitor settings manually and played with Windows' settings but to no avail. I know the AL1912 is an entry-level display but I'm sure it should be better than it is at the moment.

The Display menu lists the monitor as a plug-and-play device and gives the name and model of the graphics card. Is it not recognising the monitor?

Lee Williams, leewilliamz@aol.com

A The entry that refers to the plug-and-play monitor is fine. However, you should check the number of colours, or Colour Quality, by right-clicking on the screen background and choosing Properties then Settings. It should be set to 32-bit colour.

Next, look at your monitor's controls. All monitors have settings for brightness and contrast, and more expensive displays often have additional settings such as colour temperature. Turning the brightness down to halfway and the contrast to maximum is a good starting point from which to make further adjustments.



Graphics packages often feature sophisticated monitor-calibration tools

We published a short guide called 'How To Calibrate your LCD' in *Shopper* September 2005. This had a link to a page on our website that will help you set your brightness and contrast properly. You'll find it at www.computershopper.co.uk/html/calibrate.

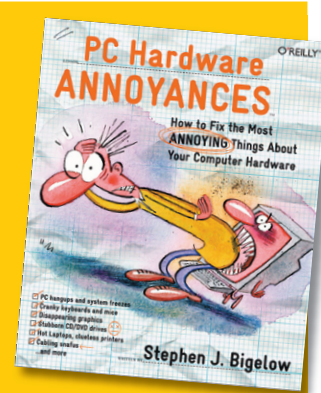
Graphics programs such as Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator have their own Gamma monitor colour adjustment utilities. These adjust the colours and try to correct the tendencies of some monitors to make certain colours brighter than others. Gamma utilities must be calibrated for each new monitor and, if set up from a previous monitor, may give strange colours. So run the calibration utility. You need to adjust the monitor's controls first. Adobe's Gamma Wizard will take you through the process.

Make sure you have just one monitor calibration utility running. If you use both Corel and Adobe applications, each may have installed its own calibrator. Any recent Gamma utility should create a standard ICC file that works with all applications.



PC Hardware Annoyances

If you send our star letter, you'll receive a prize. This month's winner gets a copy of O'Reilly's *PC Hardware Annoyances*, which will help you fix any number of hardware problems. If you don't want to spend the rest of your life troubleshooting, make sure you keep this next to your PC along with the latest copy of *Computer Shopper*. Your PC woes will disappear.




SECURITY INTERNET WORMS

NEW FORM OF BLASTER WORM?



Q A friend's computer booted up as usual, displayed a message concerning the RPC service and stated that the computer would shut down in 60 seconds. It did this then restarted and events repeated themselves. The strangest thing was that the Taskbar and hence the Start button vanished. I rebooted into Safe Mode but at some point during that process the PC reverted to booting in the usual mode.

I suspect he has a new form of the Blaster worm, but all the usual fixes for this assume that one can get to the Start button.

How did the malware get on his computer? I know that my friend's Norton AntiVirus definitions were up to date, the Windows XP Home firewall was running and Windows itself was up to date. He is new to computers, doesn't have broadband and uses the internet infrequently through a dial-up service.

My usual computer shop couldn't solve the problem and in the end we had to reload Windows. What would you have done?

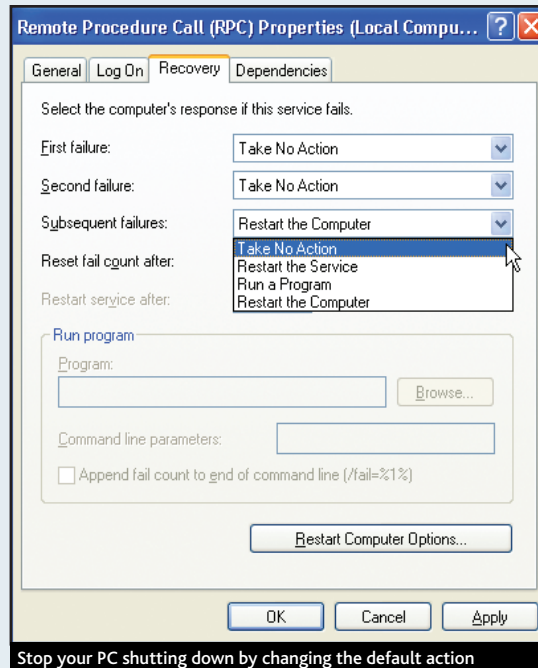
Neil Richmond, n.richmond@btinternet.com

A I am not aware of any new form of Blaster worm and, even if there were one, a firewall would have stopped it infecting the system. It is possible that some Trojan was installed by a different mechanism, used the RPC service and caused the tell-tale error.

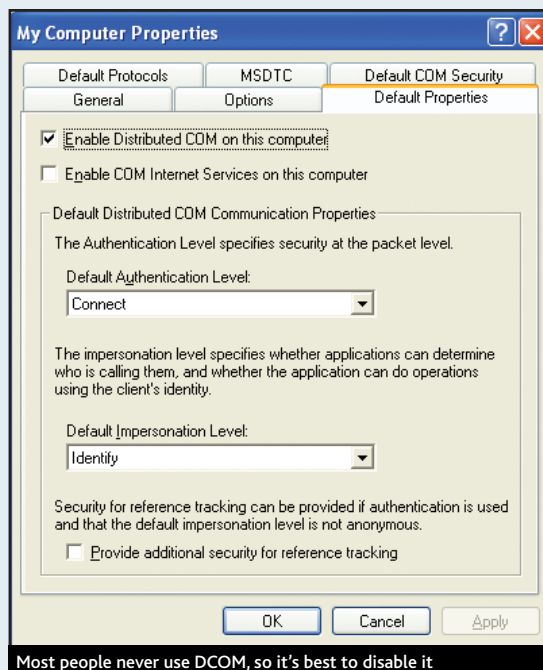
Assuming that Blaster (also known as Lovesan) was the problem, the simplest and best solution for all virus removal is to take the hard disk out of the affected computer and scan it using another, clean computer. I use the circuit board from an external USB2 drive case for this purpose. I can attach its IDE and power connectors to the drive without even taking the drive out of the affected computer.

In the second part of your question you ask what to do when the Taskbar doesn't appear. Provided Task Manager is still running, press Ctrl-Alt-Del to bring up Task Manager's window. On the General tab you will see a button called New Task. This works in the same way as the Start menu's Run command. You can now run the command `cmd.exe` to get a command-line prompt from which to run the worm removal program.

The annoying thing about RPC errors is that Microsoft has set the default action to shut down the computer if an error occurs, even though most people don't actually need this service. You can change this before the situation arises by going to Control Panel. You'll need the Performance & Maintenance section if you're not using the Classic View. Then open Administrative Tools, Services, Remote Procedure Call (RPC). Click on it to get the Properties window, then click Recovery and choose Take No Action for all three choices as shown above.



Stop your PC shutting down by changing the default action



Most people never use DCOM, so it's best to disable it

There is also a little-known Windows command that aborts the timed shutdown that the RPC error triggers. At the Task Manager's New Task prompt, or in a command-line window, you can type the command `shutdown -a`. The `-a` part aborts the pending shutdown operation, giving you time to run Symantec's FixBlast utility.

So how did Blaster get on this computer? Assuming it was Blaster, which is by far the most common cause of this error, it could only have got on the computer if there was no firewall and Windows Updates hadn't been applied. The only times I have seen this recently have been when someone has just reinstalled Windows from a CD

that does not include either SP1 or SP2 updates. Blaster spreads by using a fault in Windows' Distributed Component Object Model Remote Procedure Call interface (DCOM RPC), which was intended to allow Network Administrators to run programs such as software updates on a computer over the local network. A bug in this code allowed an attacker to run code on the remote computer. This was fixed in August 2003.

Remote Procedure Call (RPC) is obviously a very dangerous feature, and it should be possible to run it only on a local network, not over the internet. To exploit this vulnerability, the attacker must be able to send a specially designed request to port 135, 139, 445 or 593 on the remote PC. Any firewall should have blocked these ports from external access.

It amazes me how this worm manages to keep spreading, especially as a bug in its code causes the RPC error

that shuts down many affected systems. The flaw was fixed over two years ago, but Blaster still finds unpatched systems to attack. If you have to reload Windows XP on any system, I recommend that you use a newer Windows XP CD that includes Service Pack 2 (SP2), if one is available. If you have to use the older Windows XP CD to reinstall, or if the manufacturer has provided only restore discs that have an image of the original factory software, try to have an SP2 CD to hand, like the one that came with *Shopper* November 2004. Install SP2 before you connect the computer to the internet. It is also safe to connect to the internet through a router or after installing a software firewall such as ZoneAlarm.

However if, as you believe, the computer had all the Windows XP patches and Windows' firewall was running, the cause may not have been Blaster but some other kind of system corruption. While an internet search for this error message will return hundreds of pages that refer to Blaster, and although RPC errors are rare except when Blaster has infected a system, any RPC error will cause a shutdown by default. This would also explain why your local computer shop was unable to fix the problem without reinstalling Windows.

I suggest that you completely disable DCOM. Very few applications use it except in a corporate environment where centralised network administrators may need to access your computer, so why leave services that you never use running all the time? Click Start then Run and type `Dcomcnfg.exe` then click the OK button. In the window that opens, click the plus sign to expand Component Services. Then right-click My Computer and select Properties, followed by the Default Properties tab. Clear the check box *Enable Distributed COM on this Computer* and click Apply. This will take effect on your next reboot.



WINDOWS FREEZING

WINDOWS FREEZES DURING STARTUP

Q When I started my Windows 98 PC it froze on the Windows 98 screen. I was forced to restart it, but it would only start in Safe Mode. I tried the Help system, which suggested I use the Automatic Skip Driver Agent (ASD) tool. ASD highlighted two problems and I ticked both. It asked me to restart but Windows jammed at the same point. I went back to Safe Mode and ran Help again, going through every single suggestion but none worked. What should I do now?

Ian Key, Bob987725@aol.com

A There are too many possible causes and I have too little information to be able to diagnose your problem properly, but I can offer some general troubleshooting tips that should steer you in the right direction.

If the computer won't start normally but will start in Safe Mode, it could either be due to a corrupted or incompatible device driver or problems with a program or service that runs at startup in normal mode but doesn't run in Safe Mode.

Driver problems are likely to be the cause only if you have just updated a device driver, for example when downloading new drivers for your graphics card or installing new hardware. To solve these problems Windows 98 provides a tool called Automatic Skip Driver Agent (ASD.exe), which you ran. As this did not solve the problem it's not likely to be caused by a driver.

That leaves a program or service that runs on startup. Here's what I would do:

1. Click Start, Run, then type in Msconfig and click OK. Next, click the StartUp tab and disable everything there.

2. Reboot your PC when asked to do so. If this solves the problem you'll simply have to use trial and error to find which disabled item was the cause. I suggest you re-enable four entries at a time.

3. If your PC still boots up OK, re-enable the next four and so on until the problem recurs. If this happens, uncheck the last three and reboot. Continue adding one at a time until you find the culprit.

4. You may find that the problem occurs even when you have disabled everything. In this case, try a repair installation of Windows 98. The setup files may be in a folder called Win98 or Windows\Options\Cabs, or you may have to use a Windows 98 CD. Run Setup and choose the folder that matches your existing Windows installation. That way you will keep all your program information and settings.

NETWORKING FAXING

I WANT TO FAX FROM MY PC

Q Your article 'How To Fax from your PC' in *Shopper* August 2005 was very instructive, but it makes the simple but problematic assumption that we all "have a dial-up modem". I have broadband and don't have a regular modem. Can I fax from my PC and, if so, how? My local computer shop says I can't without an extra phone line.

Steve Savage, stevesavage@aol.com

A Faxes work over telephone lines. You need a fax/modem connected to some kind of landline to send faxes directly from your PC. It doesn't matter whether you use broadband or

dial-up for your internet access and in fact it's better to use broadband, otherwise you won't be able to send a fax while you are connected to the internet.

As most broadband customers use ADSL, they almost certainly have a phone line. ADSL uses a completely different frequency range for voice calls, and faxing uses the same range as voice, so you can use the same physical line for both fax and DSL simultaneously.

In the future we may see more cable modem users with Voice over IP (VoIP) phone services instead of regular phone lines. In the USA forecasts suggest that 30 per cent of phone lines will be replaced by VoIP in the next two years. Unfortunately

most VoIP phone lines can't be used for fax because the compression algorithms are designed for voice calls only.

Fax/modems are inexpensive, but if you don't want the bother of installing one you can still send faxes over the internet. There are various services available, ranging from FreeFax (www.freefax.com), which is free but puts adverts on your faxes to pay for the services, to those funded by monthly subscriptions. Efax.com is one such service, and one option allows you to receive a limited number of faxes for free, although you have to pay to send them. Check out www.savetz.com/fax/#servers for an up-to-date list of available services.

FEEDBACK INTERNET SPEED

SETTING THE MTU FOR FASTER INTERNET ACCESS



Advanced Windows, *Shopper* August 2005 has a tip for speeding up broadband by editing the MTU in the Registry. However, there appear to be two errors in the tip. First, the third screen image shows 1472 as a hexadecimal number in the active window, and 1471 as a hexadecimal number in the window behind it. In fact, it should be entered as a decimal number.

Second, according to the Microsoft Knowledge Base articles 283165 and 159211, the MTU should be set to the maximum buffer size plus 28. The screenshot in *Shopper* appears to indicate a maximum buffer size of 1472, so the MTU should be set as 1472+28, which equals 1500.

In my case the maximum buffer size without fragmentation is 1464 (in other words, ping -f -l 1464 does not display the message

"Packet needs to be fragmented but DF set", whereas ping -f -l 1465 does). So I have edited the Registry to specify an MTU of 1464+28 = 1492.

Bill Hill, wjhill@hotmail.com

A You are quite right Bill, it's our mistake entirely. Usually, if you don't set the MTU value correctly, some large packets are split in two during transmission, which slows things down a little. However, some internet routers called Black Holes are not configured correctly and may fail to pass these packets through at all. So we want to set the MTU to a value low enough that it works in all conditions, but for maximum speed we would like to make it as large as possible without causing fragmentation.

When you send a command such as ping -f -l 1472, the -f means do not fragment and the number following -l indicates the size of the data packet to

be sent. TCP/IP wraps 28 bytes of additional information (the IP and ICMP headers) around this, which means the maximum safe value for the MTU is 28 bytes greater than the largest data packet that works with ping -f.

I have found many internet sites that incorrectly tell you to set the MTU size to the size used in the ping command. Smaller numbers will always work but won't be quite as efficient.

Cable modem users can often benefit from the full 1,500 bytes, which is the default MTU for TCP/IP. Most ADSL lines use a protocol called PPPoE or, in Britain and most European countries, its variant PPPoA. This adds extra overhead so Windows XP sets the default MTU for PPPoE and PPPoA to 1,480 bytes. AOL Broadband users need to set a lower MTU. Try 1,400 bytes to avoid occasional time-outs and disconnections.



FACTFILE

REMOVING STUBBORN SECURITY PROGRAMS

WE ALL KNOW HOW IMPORTANT IT IS TO INSTALL PROPER SECURITY PRODUCTS, BUT WHAT DO YOU DO IF YOU'RE HAVING TROUBLE REMOVING THEM? READ ON TO FIND OUT

Q I want to know how to remove a software installation completely, especially pre-installed anti-virus programs that have a free trial period. I want to install an anti-virus program other than the one that came pre-installed on my computer, but wish to avoid system or program conflicts.

The simple uninstall routine removes the program but leaves folders within Windows, Programs and User Settings, to name but a few. These programs also appear in the Startup menu when I run Msconfig. Is there any way of removing all files without completely reinstalling Windows XP?

Richard Hoskins, richard.hoskins@friends provident.co.uk

A Each software developer is responsible for writing an uninstaller program that reverses all the changes their program makes to your computer when you install it. When you go to Control Panel and use the Add/Remove Programs option you run a program's uninstaller.

Unfortunately, many programmers don't pay enough attention to this part of their application. Perhaps they can't understand why anyone would want to remove their creation. As a result, many uninstaller programs do a terrible job.

I have noticed in particular that both Norton AntiVirus and McAfee VirusScan, the two anti-virus programs most likely to be pre-installed on new PCs, leave many components installed and many Registry entries behind. Removing them manually can be very difficult, but it's not impossible.

CLEANING UP

While applications are available that clean up the leftovers after a program is uninstalled, they are effective only for applications that were installed after they were. I have also seen situations where such software has caused installations to fail.

Before you start removing program components manually, and especially before you edit the Registry, it is a good idea to create a Restore Point. Go to Programs, Accessories, System Tools then System Restore.

Look for folders the uninstaller has left behind and delete them. Most of these will have obvious names and be stored in Program Files. You may also find some in Program Files\Common Files,

and data is likely to be hanging around in the Documents and Settings folder contained in each user's Application Data folder. This is a hidden folder, and to see it you need to go to Tools, Folder Options, View and tick the Show hidden files and folders option. Don't forget to look in the All Users Application Data folder, too.

It is important to check that no services have been left behind. From the Start menu click Run, type msconfig and click OK. Tick Hide All Microsoft Services and you'll see a list of services along with the developer's name. Untick any services you find that are related to the software you've uninstalled.

Some program components are stored in folders called Windows, Windows\System and Windows\System32. To find these, open Windows Explorer, navigate to the Windows\System32 folder and select View, Details. If you right-click on the column headers area, you can display additional columns for each file. Click on More and you will see columns for Company and Product Name. Add these and then click on the Company column header to sort by company.

Although not every developer puts its name on every component, you'll find most of them this way. Displaying these columns makes large folders open very slowly as the computer has to read every file to discover this information, so turn off these columns when you have finished.

EDIT THE REGISTRY

If you're confident about using the Registry editor, you can also remove at least some of the application's Registry keys, although removing them all can be difficult. Before you edit the Registry, create a Restore Point. Run RegEdit and look under both HKey_Local_Machine and Hkey_Current_User for Software. The application's entries will be labelled and fairly obvious. They usually have the manufacturer's name, although sometimes they use the product name or, confusingly, both.

For example, you may see folders for both Norton AntiVirus and Symantec. You should also look under Microsoft, Windows, Current Version for keys such as Run, RunServices and others beginning with Run, as these often contain links to now deleted files.

You may also want to search the entire Registry for any references to the folder path where application files were stored. This can be tedious

and error-prone and is usually not essential. Most references will be found in the CLSID section of the Registry. They will appear within the HKey_Classes_Root\CLSID section of the Registry, where there is a list of class definitions, each with a class identifier or name consisting of a long string of hexadecimal characters enclosed in {} brackets. These entries are also known as GUIDs. When you find the program name listed in a sub-key under one of these you should move back to the left-hand window, move up to the main GUID key and delete it.

SPECIAL HELP FROM THE DEVELOPERS

Symantec, which develops the Norton range of programs, has recognised the problem of removing its software and provides various free programs that remove its applications completely. You can download them from its support website, but you have to use the appropriate one. Try a Google search for RNAV2003 if you have Norton AntiVirus 2003 or earlier, RNISUPG to remove Norton Internet Security and Personal Firewall 2003 or earlier, and SYMNRT to remove all Norton 2004 or 2005 products. These programs are designed for use only after you have tried Add/Remove programs. The Symantec website also has manual removal instructions for various programs.

McAfee recommends that you stop VirusScan running using Control Panel, VirusScan before you use Add/Remove Programs. Apparently some of its uninstallers forget to stop the application, making them unable to remove components that are in use. Its website provides detailed manual uninstall instructions for versions 5.x, 6.x and 7.x at <http://ts.mcafeehelp.com/faq.asp?docid=68717> and for version 8.x (2004) and 9.x (2005) at <http://ts.mcafeehelp.com/faq.asp?docid=71541>. You can also search Google for "Manual uninstall McAfee".

To remove McAfee Internet Security you have to follow removal instructions for each component: the anti-virus one is listed on the docid=71541 page of the website mentioned above. To find out how to remove the Privacy Service component use the same web address as above but put docid=71517 at the end instead of docid=71541. This includes a special removal tool called RemoveMPS. Details for Personal Firewall are at docid=71501, while SpamKiller is at docid=69205. SecurityCenter is usually easy to uninstall once all other components have been removed.

WINDOWS REGISTRY

ARE THESE ALERTS FALSE?

Q When using the internet my colleague and I get warnings that there are Registry problems and are invited to visit www.pcregfix.com or www.fix.comp.com for a fix. We both use Windows XP Professional. In both cases Norton AntiVirus, Spybot and Ad-Aware show that our computers are clean and, in my case, Norton Works indicates that the Registry is OK. This, and the fact that the messages

vary and occur only when we're online, suggest that these are not genuine alerts. Is this true?
Keith Jones, senoj07-alpha1@yahoo.co.uk

A As you have suspected, it's a scam. No Registry scan has been performed on your computer. Some of these pop-ups come through the Messenger service, which Microsoft left turned on by default but which is only ever needed

in a corporate network situation. Others may be pop-up adverts from certain websites or generated by spyware or adware.

I recommend that you download Microsoft AntiSpyware, the free beta version of which is available until the end of 2005. You can get it from www.microsoft.com/athome/security/spyware. As well as scanning for spyware, this program also offers to turn off the Messenger service for you.





WINDOWS UPDATES

AUTOMATIC UPDATES HAS A PROBLEM



For no apparent reason I can no longer receive automatic updates from Microsoft. I get the error message:

"Automatic Updates has encountered a problem and needs to close.

Error Signature

App Name: wuauclt.exe Ver:5.4.3790.2182

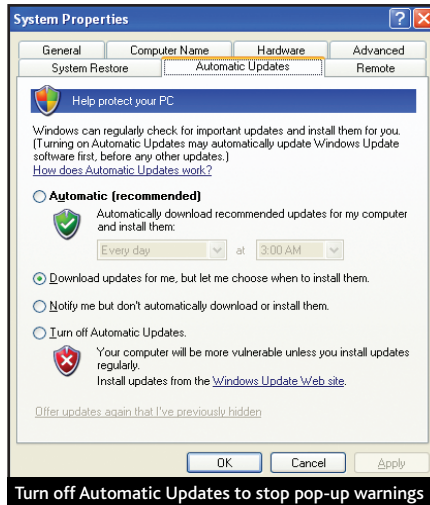
ModName:esent.dll Ver:5.1.2600.2180 offset:000c4f9d."

I have tried to report this to Microsoft but to no avail. The pop-up appears every few seconds after I start the PC and then at regular intervals for as long as the PC is on. Service Pack 2 is installed, together with Norton AntiVirus 2004 and, until a short time ago, everything was fine. Please advise, as this is driving me potty!

Peter Brett, pbrett9439@aol.com



The first thing to do is to turn off automatic updates to avoid the constant pop-up warnings. Right-click on My Computer, choose Properties and then the Automatic Updates tab. Deselect the option Keep my computer up to date or select Turn off Automatic Updates.



Next, see if you can get Windows Update the old-fashioned way. Windows Update should appear in the Start Menu. If you don't see it there, open Internet Explorer (other web browsers won't work) and go to <http://windowsupdate.microsoft.com>. This will direct you to the current Windows Update site.

If Windows Update fails, try the site's excellent troubleshooter. You might have some corrupted files or may have installed other software such as a firewall that is interfering. It is also possible that your PC has been infected with a virus or other malware that is deliberately blocking Windows Update.

I suggest you try a virus scan using <http://housecall.trendmicro.com>. Anti-virus software installed on your computer may have been disabled by a virus that established itself before the appropriate anti-virus signatures were available. Next, install the Microsoft AntiSpyware program (see page 225). Also, check the Hosts file. This is a text file stored in the Windows\System32\Drivers\Etc folder. Because it has no file extension Windows always asks which program you want to open it with. You can use a text editor such as Notepad. The entries in this file override the normal mechanism for accessing each site listed. For example, adding a site to this list and the IP address 127.0.0.1 blocks access to that site. Normally there is not much in this file except comments, although some anti-spyware software and ad-blocker programs put entries in it. Some viruses and spyware also add entries to the list to block popular anti-virus or anti-spyware sites. Check to see if there are any entries relating to Windows Update.

MORE THINGS TO TRY

IF THE SUGGESTIONS ABOVE DON'T SOLVE THE PROBLEM, HERE ARE A FEW MORE TRICKS YOU CAN TRY

1) Reset Internet Explorer settings

From the Control Panel run Internet Options. On the General tab click Delete Cookies and Delete Files, select the box to Delete all off-line content and click OK. Next click the Security tab. Click on each zone to select it, then click the Default Level button and Apply.

On the Connections tab click LAN Settings and make sure that no proxy server is enabled. If a proxy server is specified, make a note of its settings before disabling it. Some ISPs add a proxy server to reduce the load on their internet connection but there is usually no need for this. If your PC connects to the internet through an office network, you may have to go through a proxy server. Check with your network administrator. If this is the case, you should make sure there are no exclusions listed in the box at the bottom.

Next click the Advanced tab followed by Restore Defaults and Apply. Still on the Advanced tab, uncheck the option to Enable third-party browser extensions. Scroll down to HTTP 1.1 Settings and make sure that the options to Use HTTP 1.1 and Use HTTP 1.1 through proxy connections are selected. After clicking Apply and OK restart the computer and try Windows Update again.

2) Check the services needed to run Windows Update

From the Start menu choose Run, type services.msc and click OK. Then repeat the following steps for each of these three services:

Background Intelligent Transfer Service (BITS), Event Log and Automatic Updates.

Double-click each service to bring up its Properties window. Click on the Log On tab and make sure the Local System account option is selected and that the option to Allow service to interact with desktop is unchecked. On the same page you will see a list of one or more Hardware Profiles. Make sure these are enabled, with the exception of Event Log, which does not have this option. If they're not, click the Enable button.

Switch to the General tab and make sure the Startup type is set to Automatic. Then click the Start button beneath the Service status label to start the service.

3) Check that the Windows Update temporary files folder isn't corrupted

To check for this problem we need to rename the folder so that Windows Update creates a new one. Click Start, Run, type cmd.exe and press Enter. In the command prompt window type the following command:

```
net stop WuAuServ
```

Next, click on My Computer and open your Windows folder. On different systems this may be called Windows or WINNT. Look inside for a folder called SoftwareDistribution. Rename this to SDold. Then switch back to the command prompt window and run the command:

```
net start WuAuServ
```

4) Re-register Windows Update components

Open a command prompt window again and type in the following commands, one after the other:

```
Regsvr32 msxml3.dll
Regsvr32 wuapi.dll
Regsvr32 wuaueng.dll
Regsvr32 wucltui.dll
Regsvr32 wups.dll
Regsvr32 wuweb.dll
Regsvr32 qmgr.dll
Regsvr32 qmgrprxy.dll
Regsvr32 jscript.dll
```

The message 'succeeded' should appear after each command if a component has been registered successfully.

5) Disable or uninstall any firewalls or other internet-related programs that may affect the internet connection

Microsoft suggests that, in addition to firewalls, the following programs can affect a connection to the Windows Update site: TweakMASTER DNS, Web Accelerator, Download Accelerator, GetRight and Browser Blaster. If you have any other similar programs, such as a pop-up blocker, remove or disable it to see if this rectifies the problem.

If the problem appears to be due to a firewall, you will need to have a look at its configuration. Firewalls usually permit access to Windows Update but a user may have accidentally added a Windows Update component to the blocked programs list.



WINDOWS DISK TOOLS

DEFRAG WON'T COMPLETE

Q I use Windows 98 SE and have two hard disks, the usual C: and an old D: drive that I use for extra storage space. I can defrag D: without any problem, but when I defrag the C: drive the progress bar does nothing, although the system seems to be going through the motions.

I have tried reinstalling Windows but the fault remains. Both worked once, so have I lost a .DLL file somewhere?

Neville Knight, nevknight@tiscali.co.uk

A If you were missing a .DLL file, Defrag would not work at all. The problem is that another application or service running in the background keeps accessing the

drive. Each time Defrag detects that the drive might have changed, it starts again.

Often the culprit is an anti-virus program, although any background task can cause this. I use an application called WinPatrol, which constantly checks for changes to system files. It will mess up Defrag and should be turned off temporarily.

You could try pressing Control-Alt-Del and using Task Manager to end non-essential background tasks, although under Windows 98 some tasks do not appear in Task Manager and often the problem remains even after you have shut down every task you can find. The Windows XP Defrag is not affected by this problem, and nor is the Speed Disk program that comes with Norton Utilities and Systemworks.

There are a couple of ways of dealing with this problem. The simplest is to restart the computer in Safe Mode and then run Defrag. You do this by pressing F8 while Windows is starting. Safe Mode slows disk accesses, but if you leave Defrag to run overnight that won't matter.

Another method is to use Msconfig to stop background tasks and services running. You then restart Windows, run Defrag, run Msconfig to turn everything back on and restart Windows. To avoid all this hassle you can experiment by disabling a few tasks at a time until you discover which ones cause the problem. Then simply stop those tasks or services when you need to run Defrag. WinPatrol is useful for this, as it can kill tasks that the Windows Task Manager doesn't show.

WINDOWS REMOVABLE INSTALL

INSTALLING WINDOWS 98 ON A DVD-RW

Q My favourite version of Scrabble won't run on Windows XP, but it was quite happy with Windows 98. I have a PC with Windows XP Home pre-installed and a recovery disc. Running both operating systems side by side won't be easy.

Would it be possible to install Windows 98 on a DVD-RW disc, along with the Scrabble program, and boot directly from that whenever I fancied a game? With the DVD out of the drive,

my PC would then boot into Windows XP as usual. There are probably all sorts of reasons why this wouldn't work, but I'd be grateful for your expert help.

Mike Bennett, mike@01359.com

A I don't think this will work – or at least not without a lot of clever tricks. While most modern PCs can boot from a CD or DVD, the operating system on that read-only disc

has to be designed so that it doesn't need to write to the CD. Windows 98 requires write access to its Registry and other files from the moment it boots up.

The computer BIOS supports only reading from a CD or DVD, not writing. The software layer that supports writing to a CD-RW or DVD-RW – a process called packet writing – is not loaded until much later in the boot process.

While there are special versions of Windows that boot from a CD (in fact every Windows setup CD uses one) they are not readily available to end-users. It would be better to investigate why your version of Scrabble runs on Windows 98 but not on Windows XP.

Windows XP has an extensive range of compatibility options to enable old programs to run on it. We discussed the problems of installing Windows 98 on a computer that comes with Windows XP pre-installed in *Helpfile, Shopper* August 2005. This month's *Advanced Windows* (page 219) also explains how to install Windows 98 on an XP system using two FAT32 partitions.

FEEDBACK RESTARTING

XP DOESN'T WANT TO SHUT DOWN



I read with interest the star letter in *Helpfile, Shopper* July 2005. I have experienced the same problem, where Windows XP refuses to shut down. Having tried all the usual advice I finally resorted to Shaun Leggott's solution.

It was only when I added a second hard disk that I noticed the connector from the front panel power switch lead was not sitting squarely on the motherboard. Since connecting it properly I have had no further problems.

Peter O'Connell, pjeoc@lineone.net

HARD DISK BOOT FAILURE

PROBLEM WITH AGEING MESH COMPUTER

Q My PC, which I have had for two and a half years, displays the message "Disk boot failure, insert system disk and press enter". One reason I bought the PC was the three-year collect-and-return warranty. Mesh now wants me to open the recovery CD and perform a clean installation of Windows XP, which will wipe all the data from my disk.

I am left with the daunting task of reloading the old software and data backups, as well as Service Pack 1a, Service Pack 2 and all the software upgrades – all using a premium rate support line. I will also need to re-enter all those codes, serial numbers and so on.

My initial diagnosis was that the hard disk had failed, but when I removed my second backup hard disk, the computer burst into life again. It is hardly practical to start up the computer by removing and reinstalling a hard disk. Can you tell me what is going on?

Neil Freeman

A I think you'll find that no computer maker's warranty covers Windows issues. Windows often gets corrupted, which can result in that error message. All manufacturers will ask you to reinstall Windows before they consider the possibility of a hardware problem.

Unfortunately, as you point out, what is convenient for the telephone support technician is not at all convenient for the end-user. You would be faced with a lot of work after reinstalling Windows. Let this be a warning to you: you need backups.

I strongly suggest a complete disk backup of the kind pioneered by Norton Ghost. These days I use Acronis True Image, which is cheaper.

Fortunately, your hard disk "burst into life" when you removed the second drive. This suggests to me that the second drive has failed, or perhaps that someone has messed with its jumpers. If two drives share a cable and both are set to master, you won't be able to read either of them. **CS**